

1 HOUSE JOINT MEMORIAL 66

2 48TH LEGISLATURE - STATE OF NEW MEXICO - FIRST SESSION, 2007

3 INTRODUCED BY

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10 A JOINT MEMORIAL

11 RECOGNIZING THE HEALTH RISKS OF URANIUM MINING AND PROCESSING
12 IN NATIVE AMERICAN AND NON-NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITIES;
13 REQUESTING A COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPACTS OF PAST
14 URANIUM MINING AND PROCESSING ACTIVITIES IN NEW MEXICO;
15 RECOMMENDING A SUSPENSION OF ALL PERMITTING AND LICENSING OF
16 URANIUM MINING AND PROCESSING ACTIVITIES IN NEW MEXICO PENDING
17 THE COMPLETION OF THAT ASSESSMENT.

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19 WHEREAS, the uranium mining industry and the federal
20 government in the period from the 1950s to the 1970s failed to
21 advise uranium miners and their families of the health risks
22 associated with uranium mining and processing; and

23 WHEREAS, Native American uranium miners in particular
24 were not provided protective clothing or respirators; the
25 uranium mines in which they worked were not ventilated or were

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1 poorly ventilated; and uranium mine and mill wastes were used
2 for housing construction by Native American families who were
3 unaware of the health risks of using such construction
4 materials; and

5 WHEREAS, beginning in the early 1950s, the United States
6 public health service conducted studies that revealed
7 respiratory illnesses such as lung cancer, silicosis,
8 tuberculosis, pneumonia and emphysema were causing high rates
9 of death among underground uranium miners; and

10 WHEREAS, by 1959 public health service studies of uranium
11 miners revealed there was a statistically significant
12 association between uranium mining and lung cancer; and

13 WHEREAS, Navajo, Acoma and Laguna uranium miners, widows
14 and family members testified in congressional hearings in the
15 1970s about the hardships their families suffered from the
16 illnesses and premature deaths associated with the miners'
17 work in the uranium mines and mills in New Mexico, Arizona,
18 Colorado and Utah; and

19 WHEREAS, hundreds of abandoned, unreclaimed uranium mines
20 still exist in communities in northwestern New Mexico, and
21 scores of Native American and non-Native American families
22 still live in close proximity to those mines; and

23 WHEREAS, state and federal studies have repeatedly shown
24 that surface water, ground water and soils were and remain
25 irreversibly contaminated by past uranium mining and milling

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1 activities, and that livestock that grazed in the mining areas
2 were found to have hazardous levels of radioactive materials
3 in their edible organs and muscle; and

4 WHEREAS, no comprehensive studies of the public health
5 impact of past mining and processing and the continuing
6 environmental impacts of abandoned mines have been conducted
7 in New Mexico's uranium mining districts; and

8 WHEREAS, more than a dozen companies have applied for
9 permits or licenses to explore for uranium and to construct
10 new mining and milling facilities on hundreds of thousands of
11 acres in northwestern New Mexico without agreeing to assist
12 the state or Indian tribes in remediating the environmental
13 impacts of past uranium mining activities; and

14 WHEREAS, at least thirteen Navajo Nation chapters, along
15 with major Navajo institutions, including the Navajo Nation
16 council, as well as the Pueblo of Acoma and the all Indian
17 pueblo council, have adopted resolutions opposing efforts of
18 the uranium mining industry to resume uranium mining and
19 milling operations in and near the Navajo Nation and the
20 Pueblo of Acoma cultural province; and

21 WHEREAS, such proposed new uranium mining activities may
22 adversely affect the land, water, air and cultural resources
23 of the Navajo Nation and the New Mexico pueblos, including
24 Mount Taylor, which is a sacred site for the Navajo Nation and
25 the Pueblo of Acoma;

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1 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE
2 STATE OF NEW MEXICO that the state of New Mexico and its
3 governmental agencies and political subdivisions recognize the
4 ongoing public health risks of past and future uranium mining
5 and processing activities in and near the Navajo Nation, the
6 Pueblos of Acoma and Laguna and communities throughout the
7 Grants mineral belt; and

8 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the department of health, in
9 collaboration with the department of environment and the
10 mining and minerals division of the energy, minerals and
11 natural resources department, and with appropriate agencies of
12 the Navajo Nation and the Pueblos of Acoma and Laguna, be
13 requested to compile and report on an assessment of existing
14 uranium-mining-contaminated areas within New Mexico,
15 including all areas in Indian country, and to make
16 recommendations for environmental restoration, public health
17 studies and other measures needed to address the legacy of
18 past uranium mining and processing; and

19 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the department of health
20 present its report to the governor and to the appropriate
21 interim legislative committees by October 30, 2007 and make
22 its report available to the public in both hard copy and
23 electronic form; and

24 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that all local, state, federal and
25 tribal agencies be requested to refrain from issuing any

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1 permits or licenses for uranium exploration, mining and
2 processing until completion and submission of the report by
3 the department of health to the governor and appropriate
4 interim legislative committees; and

5 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that copies of this memorial be
6 transmitted to the governor, the secretary of health, the
7 secretary of energy, minerals and natural resources, the
8 secretary of environment, the office of the attorney general,
9 the president of the Navajo Nation, the speaker of the Navajo
10 Nation council, the attorney general of the Navajo Nation,
11 members of the Navajo Nation council resources committee, the
12 governors of the Pueblos of Acoma and Laguna, the chair of the
13 federal nuclear regulatory commission, the administrator of
14 the federal environmental protection agency, the chief of the
15 federal department of agriculture, the acting director of the
16 bureau of land management of the federal department of the
17 interior, the federal assistant secretary for Indian affairs
18 and members of New Mexico's congressional delegation.

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